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Identical letters dated 21 November 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the thirty-third report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/962).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the positions it has previously communicated in its identical letters to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council responding to the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic finds it regrettable that the Secretariat has persisted in taking a counterproductive, partial, biased and unprofessional approach to the important, sensitive and pivotal issue of humanitarian assistance in Syria. The responsibilities and mandate of the Secretariat require it to address in earnest the concerns that the Syrian Government has raised in monthly letters on the topic. This raises a number of questions:

(a) Why does the Secretariat persist in ignoring the fundamental factor that has brought the humanitarian situation in Syria to crisis point, namely the presence of terrorism? The Secretariat denies the reality that combating terrorism is the basic precondition for an immediate and tangible improvement to the humanitarian situation in Syria. The facts show that the humanitarian situation has improved considerably in former areas of armed terrorist activity that have been liberated by the Syrian Government and its allies.

(b) Why has the Secretariat bogged itself down in dubious attempts to legitimize and defend the presence of armed terrorist groups in Syria? It has described the groups using such broad and non-legal terms as "non-State opposition groups" and "armed non-State groups". The crimes, violations and acts of terrorism committed by the armed terrorist groups and their backers have been documented; yet the Secretariat continues to avoid calling things by their proper names.

(c) Why does the Secretariat ignore the support provided by the regimes of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, alongside certain Arab governments that claim to

be concerned about the rights and humanitarian plight of the Syrian people? Why does it ignore the armed terrorist groups active in Syria, which have murdered and destroyed, denied Syrians access to basic services, and prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching those who need it?

(d) Why has the Secretariat espoused the position of certain States that are hostile to the Syrian Government? The Secretariat is supposed to treat all States members of the United Nations in a transparent and equitable manner. It is supposed to uphold the Charter and objectives of the United Nations, not the interests of specific States.

(e) Why is the Secretariat afraid to expose and condemn the role of certain States and actors that support terrorism in fomenting and prolonging the crisis in Syria, hampering efforts to find a solution, and bringing the humanitarian situation and living conditions to crisis point?

(f) Why does the Secretariat persist in including in its reports erroneous information, unsubstantiated claims and inaccurate statistics?

(g) Why are the reports and other writings of the Secretariat regarding the situation in Syria consistently prone to exaggeration, politicization and misinformation?

(h) The Secretariat ought to adopt a new approach to the humanitarian situation in Syria, one that is based on professionalism and objectivity. It should designate staff members who are better trained and more professional, and not hostile towards Syria, to oversee the drafting of these reports. What is preventing it from doing so?

Over the last few years, the Secretariat has written 33 reports on the humanitarian situation, yet the crisis has tragically endured. The Secretariat has deliberately helped to exacerbate the situation. It has provided erroneous information to global public opinion and dampened international efforts to combat terrorism.

Following is the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding certain aspects of the current report of the Secretariat:

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regrets that, like previous reports, the report under consideration fails to achieve its presumed goal, which is to review the humanitarian situation in Syria and enhance efforts to address it without favouritism, politicization or selectivity. The Government also regrets that the Secretariat has endeavoured to level accusations against the Syrian Government and disparage the tremendous efforts that it is making to provide Syrians with basic services and support, combat terrorism and restore security and stability in all the regions and cities of Syria, in order to improve the humanitarian situation of Syrians and strengthen their resilience, and to enable displaced Syrians to return to their homes and resume their normal lives.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again finds it deplorable that the Secretariat and the authors of the report have deliberately ignored the constitutional and legal right of the Government under international law to defend its people from terrorism, particularly terrorism perpetrated by Islamic State in Iraq

and the Levant (ISIL), the Nusrah Front and the terrorist organizations and persons associated with them.

The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's deliberate refusal to acknowledge that the successful delivery of humanitarian assistance provided by United Nations and international organizations to both stable and unstable areas, most recently in October 2016, would not have been possible without the assistance, facilitation and efforts of the Syrian Government.

The Secretariat persists in disregarding the reasons why people in the eastern and western parts of Aleppo city are suffering. Aleppo was once the economic capital of Syria, and its inhabitants enjoyed a decent standard of life and access to services. The city and its people are now facing strain in the areas of security, health, education and living conditions. That situation was caused by armed terrorist groups and foreign terrorist fighters, who were brought to Syria from all over the world via Turkish territory with the assistance of the Erdoğan regime. Those terrorists are funded by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, armed by the Americans and Europeans, and espouse the extremist Wahhabist ideology of Saudi Arabia that is founded on hatred, negation of the other and murder, all of which are repudiated by Syrians. It is the terrorists who have taken the inhabitants of eastern Aleppo as human shields, preventing them from leaving the city. Every day, they have fired dozens of missiles at the western neighbourhoods of Aleppo, killing and wounding thousands. These are the terrorists to whom the Secretariat refers as the "armed opposition". The Syrian Government finds it deplorable that the Secretariat seeks to blame the suffering of Syrian civilians in Aleppo on the Syrian State and its allies that are fighting terrorism in Aleppo.

On 18 October 2016, a cessation of Syrian-Russian activities in Aleppo was announced, and the Syrian Government facilitated the arrival of a team comprising United Nations entities working in Syria, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to facilitate the evacuation of civilians from the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo. However, the armed terrorist groups prevented the evacuation from going ahead. Deplorably, the Secretariat has denied their responsibility for doing so. The fact that the armed terrorist groups have wilfully prevented the evacuation is a clear sign that they intend to continue using civilians in the eastern neighbourhoods as human shields and bargaining chips, with no regard for their living conditions or health, or the presence of children, women and the elderly.

It is unacceptable that the current report of the Secretariat says nothing about the violations of international law and international humanitarian law committed in eastern Aleppo by the armed groups, which have used the population as human shields and prevented civilians, the sick and the disabled from leaving via the crossing points designated for the voluntary evacuation of civilians who wish to exit the city.

The Syrian Government once again rejects the selective approach that the Secretariat adopted with respect to the situation in eastern Aleppo and specific areas of Syria. Such an approach is not consistent with the principles enshrined in international humanitarian law. All of Syria, including eastern and western Aleppo, is suffering as a result of the terrorism perpetrated by armed terrorist groups, the attacks carried out by the so-called international coalition and the coercive

unilateral economic measures imposed by the Americans and the Europeans. It is now well know that the Secretariat will focus on specific areas whenever the terrorist groups in those areas find themselves in dire straits. It has already done so with regard to such areas as Darayya and the old city of Homs. In that connection, the Syrian Government recalls that the Secretariat has for several years remained shamefully silent with regard to the siege imposed on western Aleppo by terrorists, who rained hundreds of shells on the area, killing hundreds of civilians.

The Secretariat ignores the close alliance between the armed terrorist groups and the terrorist organizations ISIL and the Nusrah Front, both of which are on the relevant Security Council lists, and the fact that they coordinate their attacks against civilians and Syrian government forces in Aleppo. Yet those groups' leaders have acknowledged this alliance and admitted that it is impossible to make a distinction between the armed groups that some like to designate "moderate" and the ISIL and the Nusrah Front terrorist organizations. The Secretariat has paid no attention to this extremely important issue, which ought to have prompted it to re-think its approach to the humanitarian situation in Syria generally and Aleppo in particular, and to call into question the ways in which it has violated the rules by referring to the terrorists in Aleppo as "armed opposition" and stubbornly defending them while they violated the rights of Aleppans.

The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's attempt to hide the fact the armed terrorist groups were responsible for the attack against the humanitarian convoy destined for Urum al-Kubra that resulted in the death of many innocent civilians and relief workers. In the same way, the Secretariat has covered up the fact that the armed terrorist groups deployed in eastern Aleppo, particularly the Nur al-Din al-Zanki movement, targeted the living quarters and offices of the United Nations team in Aleppo. The Secretariat refers to the incident in general terms without determining responsibility, even though it knows without a doubt who the perpetrators are.

The Syrian Government finds it deplorable that, in paragraph 21, the Secretariat fails to identify those actually responsible for the suffering inflicted on Aleppans by the shortage of medicine, food and electricity. Instead, the Secretariat has used the usual broad and inaccurate expressions to cover up the fact that terrorists are to blame. The terrorists have cut off the supply of drinking water to Aleppo city. They have stolen food and medicine intended for civilians. They are also the ones who fired missiles and mortar shells are to blame for the destruction of the Sulayman al-Halabi pumping station and other infrastructure, including electrical stations, water purification stations, oil wells and bridges. The Syrian Government also wishes to point out to the Secretariat that the delay in repairing the water and electrical stations in Aleppo and across the country are a result of significant shortages of fuel and spare parts, which cannot be imported owing to the unilateral economic measures imposed on Syria by Europe and the United States.

The Syrian Government regrets that the Secretariat has continued to depend on unreliable and biased information sources whose aim is to provide misleading information and deliberately tarnish the image of the Syrian Government. Meanwhile, the Secretariat continues to ignore reports that focus on the crimes committed by terrorists and the governments that are financing them and facilitating their passage into Syrian territory, so that they can perpetrate massacres and

exacerbate the humanitarian plight of Syrians. Perhaps the worst example of this is the reliance of the Secretariat on speculative and biased reports and information issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the reports of which have proven, time and again, to be lacking in objectivity, neutrality and credibility.

The Syrian Government deplores the reluctance of the Secretariat to state explicitly that ISIL and the Nusrah Front are terrorist organizations, and the failure of the Security Council, as yet, to characterize the Front for the Conquest of the Levant, the successor of the Nusrah Front, as a terrorist organization.

The Syrian Government rejects the attempts of the Secretariat to promote the operations carried out by the so-called international coalition led by the United States of America. It furthermore regrets the wilful omission of any reference to the civilian casualties and massive infrastructure damage caused by the aerial bombardment, including, in particular, the targeting of power plants and electricity transmission and storage infrastructure, as well as well as economic and oil installations. The Syrian Government once again strongly condemns the deliberate targeting of numerous parts of Syria by the aircraft of the States members of the so-called coalition.

The Syrian Government condemns the Secretariat's wilful and repeated disregard of the catastrophic humanitarian repercussions for Syrians of the ongoing coercive unilateral economic measures imposed by the United States of America, the European Union and other States on the most vital service sectors, such as health care, education, energy, food, water and electricity, that provide for the daily needs of Syrians, strengthen their resilience and supply them with necessary services.

Without good reason, the Secretariat has failed to fulfil its responsibility to monitor and report on how those economic measures, which are illegal under international law, have helped to exacerbate the humanitarian situation in Syria, although the Syrian Government has drawn attention to this matter repeatedly. The Secretariat has also failed to cite in its monthly report the reports of its representatives in Syria regarding the effect of those measures on the humanitarian situation in Syria. This constitutes indisputable evidence that the Secretariat is unprofessional and biased and favours the States that are imposing those measures.

The Syrian Government condemns the Secretariat's persistence in reiterating the same political and legal error that it had made previously by describing, in paragraphs 4, 5, 7 and 12, the armed terrorist groups as the non-State armed opposition, although the Secretariat is aware that those groups comprise Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Front for the Conquest of the Levant (the Nusrah Front), which are included on the Security Council list of individuals and entities associated with the ISIL and Al-Qaida terrorist organizations, as well as numerous, variously named, terrorist groups that are ideologically, financially and logistically linked to the two latter terrorist organizations. Syrian society has rejected the barbaric, extremist thinking of those groups, their poisonous ideology and their brutal and inhumane practices.

The Syrian Government finds it regrettable that Secretariat continues to promote the cross-border delivery of assistance, even though it is clear that such

delivery is ineffective and that most of the assistance thus delivered falls into the hands of armed terrorist groups in the targeted areas. The notifications sent to the Syrian Government do not meet the minimum standard of credibility with regard to figures, data, number of beneficiaries and information on the parties that receive and distribute assistance to civilian beneficiaries. The Secretariat also continues to exaggerate the amount of assistance provided and express underserved thanks in that regard to certain Governments that are recruiting foreign terrorist mercenaries from around the world and facilitating their passage into Syria, and recruiting displaced persons in camps in neighbouring States, arming them and deploying them to Syria so that they can attack the Syrian State and people.

In that connection, the Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations monitoring mechanism cannot verify that cross-border assistance is reaching its rightful beneficiaries, and has thus far proven to be incapable of doing so. We remind you that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are entry points for arms, materiel and ammunition being smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Syrian Government confirms that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has failed to respond to that proposal.

The Syrian Government finds it unacceptable that, in speaking of the obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the Secretariat failed to refer to the responsibility of armed terrorist groups, described as "moderate" by some Western Governments and radical regimes in the region, for obstructing the delivery of such assistance to areas where those groups are prevalent or have imposed siege and for preventing Syrian Arab Red Crescent representatives from entering several areas and delivering aid.

The Syrian Government wishes to inform the Secretariat that the party responsible for the suffering of the Palestine refugees, which have taken the inhabitants of the Yarmouk camp, the Khan al-Shaykh camp and other areas hostage, and are restricting their movement and access to humanitarian aid.

The Syrian Government affirms the importance and centrality of the facilitation and support that it provides to United Nations organizations and programmes. During the reporting period, numerous medical evacuations were carried out and humanitarian assistance was provided to a number of Syrian communities and towns, without distinction. In particular, several patients were evacuated from the town of Madaya in Rif Dimashq, which also received humanitarian assistance thanks to the efforts and swift response of the Syrian Government and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to the humanitarian and health needs of the town's inhabitants. The Syrian Government reiterates that those who are behind the armed terrorist groups besieging the towns of Fu'ah and Kafraya are the main reason for the failure to reach an agreement that would finally end the suffering not only in those two towns but also in Zabadani and Madaya. The Syrian Government provides a genuine and swift response to emergency situations.

The Syrian Government once again strongly condemns the Secretariat's continuing bias towards the Turkish Government to the detriment of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians in Hasakah governorate who have been affected by that Government's deliberate closure of the Nusaybin border crossing and its refusal to approve United Nations requests for humanitarian assistance destined for

Hasakah governorate to be brought in via that crossing. The Syrian Government reaffirms that the temporary closure of the crossing over a number of months, since December 2015, is not for security reasons but rather for well-known political reasons. In short, it is aimed at increasing the suffering of Syrian civilians in Hasakah and Qamishli besieged by armed terrorist groups, notably ISIL.

The Syrian Government finds it regrettable that the Secretariat continues to include in the report inaccurate or unreliable figures and statistics on the number of visa applications submitted by United Nations agencies. The correct information is that, in October, the Syrian Government approved 37 entry visa applications for staff of United Nations organizations and specialized agencies. The Government had also approved the renewal of 54 visas, and not 46 as stated in the report.

The Syrian Government regrets the Secretariat's ongoing effort, as in paragraph 33 of the report, to paint a negative picture of the work being done by foreign non-governmental organizations in Syria and to allege that they are facing administrative obstacles. The Syrian Government would like to correct the inaccurate information contained in the Secretariat's current report:

- To date, the number of international non-governmental organizations authorized to carry out relief and humanitarian work in Syria stands at 24, not 17. In November, a United States non-governmental organization was added to the list of international non-governmental organizations authorized to work in Syria.
- The Syrian Government is providing those organizations with all possible facilitation and assistance to carry out their work as effectively as possible and in a way that responds to the needs of as many affected Syrians as possible, in accordance with Syrian laws and regulations.

The most significant obstacles impeding the work of those organizations and their ability to execute projects rapidly are the unilateral economic measures imposed by the Europeans and the Americans against Syria. Those measures have prevented those organizations from securing and receiving the funding they require and securing the supplies, material and equipment they need to execute their projects in Syria. For example, the non-governmental organization Oxfam was unable for some time to secure diesel fuel to supply the water purification plant in Aleppo because the European Union did not permit the importation of that fuel for that purpose. This prevented Oxfam from executing the project and, coupled with the cutting off of water pipes by armed terrorist groups, caused a sharp drop in the amount of drinking water available to the residents of Aleppo.

The Syrian Government is surprised that the Secretariat states that United Nations staff are being detained. That is absolutely untrue. The Syrian Government has informed the United Nations of the status of several of its local staff members who were arrested on charges of cooperation with terrorists and had their cases referred to the competent courts.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on dialogue among Syrians under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. It stresses that the political approach goes hand in hand with counter-terrorism efforts, which will continue until all armed terrorist groups active

throughout Syria are eradicated. In that connection, the Syrian Government stresses that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General needs to carry out his duties and reminds the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people with no legal or moral basis.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its call on the Security Council to prevail on those States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from doing so, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and terrorist financing, particularly resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering an unprecedented amount of humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex I to the identical letters dated 21 November 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Crimes and indiscriminate attacks committed by ISIL, the Nusrah Front, the Free Army, the Army of Conquest, Ahrar al-Sham, the Army of Conquest and other armed terrorist groups and ignored by the authors of the report

- During the reporting period, attacks carried out by certain armed terrorist groups with, inter alia, mortar shells and explosive devices, killed 98 civilians and injured hundreds of others.
- Armed terrorist groups shelled the city of Dar'a, killing one adult and six children, injuring 31 civilians, including women and children, and causing significant material damage.
- Armed terrorist groups fired 12 shells at the residential neighbourhoods of Abbasiyyin, Bab Tuma, Hamidiyah, Amarah, Umawiyyin Square and Qassa', in Damascus and Rif Dimashq. A woman was killed; several civilians, including women and children, were injured, some of them severely; and significant material damage was caused.
- On 1 October 2016, in the city of Aleppo, armed terrorist groups belonging to the so-called Nusrah Front, the Nur al-Din al-Zanki battalion, the Islamic Front, Liwa' al-Tawhid, the Badr Martyrs Brigade, the Emigrants Brigade and Northern Shield, which had deployed in the Bustan al-Basha, Rashidin and Bustan al-Qasr neighbourhoods, fired scores of mortar shells, rockets and gas cylinder missiles at the Sulayman al-Halabi, Aziziyah, Shahba', Maydan, Maysalun, Furqan and Idha'ah neighbourhoods. Nine people were killed; 25 others, including women and children, were injured; and some buildings, shops, vehicles and infrastructure were damaged.
- Armed terrorist groups fired three shells at the countryside north of Homs city, killing a child.
- On 7 October 2016, in the city of Aleppo, armed terrorist groups belonging to the so-called Nusrah Front, the Nur al-Din al-Zanki battalion, the Islamic Front, Liwa' al-Tawhid, the Badr Martyrs Brigade, the Emigrants Brigade and Northern Shield, which had deployed in the Bustan al-Basha, Rashidin, Bustan al-Qasr and Ansari neighbourhoods, fired scores of mortar shells, rockets and gas cylinder missiles at the Sulayman al-Halabi, Aziziyah, Shahba', Maydan, Maysalun, Furqan and Idha'ah neighbourhoods, killing nine people and injuring 75 others, including women and children, and damaging some buildings, shops, vehicles and infrastructure.
- On 5 October 2016, armed terrorist groups detonated the Barada spring water main in the area between the Fijah spring and Dayr Qanun. The water main feeds the Fijah spring, the Qudsaya neighbourhood and the Marwan wells in Dimas.

- Armed terrorist groups belonging to the so-called Confederation of Glory and Jund al-Aqsa fired a rocket at the village of Zulaqiyyat near the town of Muhradah. A woman and child were killed by shrapnel.

Annex II to the identical letters dated 21 November 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Examples of humanitarian assistance that was delivered during October 2016 thanks to the facilitation provided by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations and other international organizations, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, in addition to the assistance provided by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, thanks to the facilitation of the Syrian Government, delivered to various governorates humanitarian food, non-food and medical assistance provided from inside Syrian territory by United Nations agencies. A total of 2,061,685 beneficiaries (407,796 families) received food parcels provided by the World Food Programme through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The number of beneficiaries of United Nations humanitarian assistance, in the form of food parcels alone, distributed from inside Syrian territory is estimated at 3,494,489 beneficiaries (698,897 families).

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, with various forms of cooperation from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, delivered to most governorates humanitarian assistance provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross from within Syrian territory. Estimates are that 114,932 food packages were delivered to 574,660 beneficiaries, in addition to the tens of thousands of packages of canned food, other food items and kitchen supplies delivered to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries.

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, with cooperation from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, delivered humanitarian assistance (food, non-food and medical items, water purifiers, wheelchairs and baby food) provided by United Nations agencies, ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and non-governmental organizations in Syria.

- From 2014 through the end of May 2016, a total of 136,982 food parcels and 42,580 medical parcels have been delivered to the inhabitants of the camp by UNRWA. That is in addition to the continuing operation to provide non-food aid, other foodstuffs and medical care. We also note that the Palestine refugees in Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham are inhabitants of Yarmouk camp who were displaced from the camp after the terrorist organization ISIL overran it in April 2015 in collusion with the terrorist Nusrah Front and other terrorist groups present inside the camp. UNRWA has ceased to provide its assistance to residents of the Yarmouk refugee camp through Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham, because the armed terrorist groups inside the camp issued a statement declaring themselves to be the only bodies authorized to oversee the distribution of assistance and to receive aid convoys entering Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham.